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TAGS: [POL](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PINS](#) [PINR](#) [MOPS](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: PRT DIYALA: IRAQI ARMY ACTIONS IN KHANAQIN RAISE  
KURDISH FEARS

REF: BAGHDAD 2759 BAGHDAD 2820

Classified By: Political Affairs Minister-Counselor Robert S. Ford  
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (U) This is a PRT Diyala reporting cable.

Summary  
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12. (C) Diyala Provincial Council Chairman Ibrahim Bajellan (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, PUK) told us that negotiators, who have met the past few days in Baghdad, have worked to defuse the tense confrontation between Kurdish forces and the Iraqi Army (IA) in the town of Khanaqin in Diyala province. According to Bajellan, on September 2, negotiating teams agreed on a key point essential for preventing further aggression - that any Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) entering towns with substantial Kurdish populations would be comprised of IA and Kurdish Peshmerga. Bajellan commented that Assistant Governor Emad Jaleel Abdullah (Kurdish Democratic Party, KDP) had remained in Khanaqin this week because he and his KDP colleagues were less optimistic about an equitable outcome. Although clearly tense, our Kurdish contacts expressed guarded optimism that the confrontation would be resolved within a few days. Bajellan reiterated that Kurds fear they will once again be subject to GOI aggression while holdovers from Saddam Hussein's regime command ISF in Diyala. There could well be some posturing on the part of these local Kurdish leaders as well in order to stir up the local population. We also note that a march in Khanaqin last week organized by the Kurdish political parties to protest the approach of the Iraqi army did not generate a huge outpouring of marchers. End Summary.

Tensions Appear to Slightly Ease in Khanaqin  
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13. (C) On September 2, PRT Team Leader and Government Rule of Law Advisor met with Diyala Provincial Council Chairman Bajellan and members of the "Kurdish Bloc," including Hussam Ali Hamad al-Jaaf (PUK), Amal Shakir al-Zankani, and Chairman of the Provincial Council Tribal Reconciliation Committee Kadhém Ibrahim al-Mahdawi (an independent Sunni who is a member of the Kurdish bloc) to discuss the current status of Khanaqin. All stressed the need for both sides to talk and avoid any developments that could have negative long-term consequences. Although clearly tense, they expressed guarded optimism that the confrontation would be resolved within a few days. Bajellan said Kurdish representatives from Khanaqin had met every day with the IA since the August 26 Kurdish protest in Khanaqin (reftel). He added that Khanaqin residents had provided food and water for the troops because the IA had failed to deliver supplies to its troops.

Khanaqin Revives Kurds' Historic Fears of Arabization  
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14. (C) Bajellan and al-Jaaf stressed the Kurds' concern about LTGen Ali Ghedan and other top ISF generals in Diyala

who previously served in Saddam Hussein's army and, in their opinion, still possess strong Arab nationalist tendencies. Al-Jaaf noted that the IA had implemented Saddam's anti-Kurdish campaigns, including the 1975 removal of over 1,000 Kurdish families from Khanaqin Qada (district), which emptied 55 villages and over 400 houses in the city of Khanaqin. Additionally, thousands of Kurdish families were subsequently forced out of Khanaqin by smaller army operations. They told us that Saddam had then moved Sunni Arabs into the Kurdish houses and farms and paid them substantial amounts of money.

15. (C) Bajellan and the other members of the Kurdish bloc criticized the IA for allegedly moving into Khanaqin while skipping over Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) hotspots such as Imam Wais, the Hamreen Mountains, and other areas in eastern Diyala during the recent security operations. They characterized Khanaqin as the peaceful refuge where many Iraqi officials from nearby Qadas (districts) located their families for security reasons. Bajellan added that not one Coalition Forces (CF) soldier has been killed in Khanaqin. (Note: Although Diyala was the only province that the GOI characterized as "lost to al Qaeda" in 2007, AQI was not able to extend its control into Khanaqin Qada. End Note.) Bajellan said the fact that the ISF ignored nearby AQI hotspots and went to Khanaqin showed that Operation Benevolent Diyala was really a political purge, not an anti-terrorist campaign.

Call for the GOI to Adhere to Article 140  
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16. (C) Bajellan and al-Jaaf said that an equitable long-term resolution of the issues in Khanaqin could only be achieved through the implementation of Article 140. Al-Jaaf noted that the GOI should expedite resettlement of internally displaced persons (IDPs). He said that a number of Kurds have returned in the past three years, but that many had been unable to reclaim their houses as prescribed by Article 140. (Comment: Article 140 stipulates a period of "normalization" prior to census and elections. Kurds insist that "normalization" include the return of Kurds to land they occupied before Arabization and removal of Arabs relocated to formerly Kurdish areas. End Comment.) Bajellan claimed the GOI must provide housing to Kurdish squatters, but that the GOI was instead offering them a piece of land in the provinces they came from in addition to 20 million Iraqi Dinars (ID). According to Bajellan, many squatters had refused the GOI's offer. Bajellan said that once this was resolved, they can conduct a census as required by Article 140 followed by a referendum to determine whether the people of the area want to remain in Diyala province or become part of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG). Al-Jaaf added confidently that the vote would surely be to join the KRG.

PC Chair Roughed-Up?  
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17. (C) Rumors swirling around the Governance Center and alleged eyewitness accounts suggest that ISF personnel beat Bajellan and other male Provincial Council members - except for an older Shi'a sheikh - during the ISF's August 19 raid on the Governance Center and Provincial Council chambers. Although Bajellan denies these rumors, we have seen him limping and heard complaints of serious back problems since the raid.

Comment  
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18. (C) The events in Khanaqin have added a sense of urgency in Diyala to resolve outstanding internal border issues and implement Article 140. As described by Bajellan, the agreement reached September 2 in Baghdad will lower the level

of tension, but the presence of the IA in the area could prove to be the irritant that unhinges Diyala.

19. (C) Both Bajellan (a Talabani supporter) and Assistant Governor Emad (a Barazani backer) have been increasingly critical of ISF's conduct during Operation Benevolent Diyala (also known as Glad Tidings of Benevolence). Before the ISF launched security operations, Bajellan and Emad had expressed support for security campaigns focused on terrorists and militias (both have been repeatedly targeted by AQI and other extremists), but worried about rumors that the operation would be sectarian in nature. They subsequently charged that Operation Benevolent Diyala is really a campaign to suppress Sunni and Kurdish participation in the political process. The Kurdish leadership in Diyala now appears convinced that the GOI plans to first deal with the Sunnis and then go after the Kurds. There could well be some posturing on the part of these local Kurdish leaders as well in order to stir up the local population. Interesting, a march in Khanaqin last week to protest the approach of the Iraqi Army did not generate a huge outpouring of demonstrators. End Comment.  
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